

**STRATEGY
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A NATIONAL MILITARY STRATEGY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

BY

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ABSTRACT

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This paper examines current policy and recommends considerations for developing a military strategy for the 21st century. It reviews the existing National Security Strategy (NSS) and current National Military Strategy (NMS) to frame requirements for a future NMS. It will identify what kind of military is required for the future emerging security environment of the new millenium. It will also explore the type of force structure necessary for this changing security environment. Finally and most critically, it will challenge the remnants of the Cold War apparatus that supported a strategy of containment to determine its relevance for the imperative of engagement.

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A NATIONAL MILITARY STRATEGY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

The post-Cold War era and end of the bipolar world have stripped us of the luxury of an easily identifiable threat and with it, the corresponding strategy of containment. The "New World Order" and dynamic future are causing a shift in many paradigms and require vigilance in analyzing our military strategy to ensure its future relevance. America's recent and continued involvement in operations other than war and a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous future challenge us to closely examine our national military strategy to ensure the "armed forces can secure the objectives of national policy".¹

This paper will critically examine the existing National Security Strategy (NSS) and current National Military Strategy (NMS) to determine the requirements for a future NMS. It will focus on identifying considerations for developing the correct military ends and ways necessary to adequately and effectively support a NSS for the emerging security environment of the 21st century. What kind of military is required for the future? What kind of forces should the military retain in this changing security environment? Are the remnants of a Cold War apparatus that supported a strategy of containment relevant for the imperative of engagement?

For reasons that we will explore, there appears to be a mismatch between our security strategy and our nation's

instruments of power. Will a closer look at our security strategy provide insight that will help align our national objectives with our strategic concepts so that there is a prudent use of all elements of national power, particularly the military? The United States Army War College model for formulating and analyzing strategy employs a thought process that is based on the relationship of ends, ways, and means. The ends are national objectives, the ways are national strategic concepts, and the means are national resources.² The most effective and efficient security strategy will align resources with implementing concepts and match ways and means to accomplish the desired and stated ends. Whether these components of strategy are currently in balance in the U.S. is one of the first questions we must address.

THE QUESTION OF GRAND STRATEGY

What is our grand strategy? What is the strategy that coordinates and leverages the elements of our national power to accomplish established security objectives? Much is written, discussed, and debated on the subject. Although not unlike the other inter-war years of 1920, 1946, and 1955, the current post-Cold War strategic pause and period of transition make this process that much more difficult. Alice's confusing journey through Wonderland and especially her conversation with the

Cheshire Cat illustrate this dilemma perfectly: "If you don't know where you're going, it really doesn't matter which path you take."³ Like Alice, we must first decide where we want to go (objectives) before we set out in our strategic journey. For a sound strategy requires first and foremost a clearly identified and articulated set of objectives.

Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross provide an excellent analysis of U.S. grand strategic choices. Those choices entail four competing visions of our role in the world today. They are defined as neo-isolationism, selective engagement, cooperative security, and primacy.⁴ These grand strategies are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and they reflect how Americans view their participation in the world. Particularly during a period in which there is no peer competitor to coalesce public will, or even unite an administration's foreign policy, these grand strategies will naturally generate disagreement and rivalry. It is no more than the refined discord between idealism and realism that has characterized this debate throughout the 20th Century. The important underlining reality, and what surfaces as a constant in the development of our grand strategy and ultimately how Americans see themselves interacting globally, is our enduring national values.

Our national values will remain the foundation for current and future grand strategies. "National Security Strategy must

start with the values that we as a nation prize...values such as human dignity, personal freedom, individual rights, the pursuit of happiness, peace, and prosperity. These are the values that lead us to seek an international order that encourages self-determination, democratic institutions, economic development, and human rights. The ultimate purpose of our National Security Strategy is to protect and advance those values.⁵ It is exactly these national values that are the underpinning of the current administration's grand strategy of selective engagement. And they ultimately challenge the other competing strategies, particularly neo-isolationism, regardless of the global calm that has historically turned us inward. The Clinton administration's foreign policy has consistently tied American values to a strategy that drives our international leadership and participation. Values will continue through the next millenium to press us toward a grand strategy of engagement, and neo-isolationism is unlikely to replace it. Therefore, we need to resource the strategy and implement it with concepts that are appropriate and adequate. The crucial question becomes: Is the NMS adequate and appropriate for our continued active global participation?

A NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY FOR A NEW CENTURY

"Since all military missions flow from strategy, vagueness and inconsistency in the national strategy hampers the efficient performance of military tasks from platoon level to the Pentagon."⁶ In his observation, Metz captures the essence of B. H. Liddell Hart's connection between military strategy and political objectives: "For nations do not wage war for war's sake, but in pursuance of policy."⁷ This fundamental truth was formalized under the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reform Act of 1986. Although also designed to reorganize the U.S. military, the Goldwater-Nichols Act compels the National Command Authority to deliver to Congress a written statement of security strategy in which it answers some fundamental questions. Who are we as a nation and what is our role in the world? What are our priorities or interests and how are we to achieve them?⁸ Congress saw this written statement as a way to match national resources, or elements of national power, with an expressed national security strategy. *A National Security Strategy for a New Century*, published in October 1998, is the latest of the President's annual reports to Congress.

A review of the NSS is important for this analysis and reveals critical guidance for a comprehensive supporting military strategy. As stated previously, the grand strategy of selective engagement, with the implementing concepts of

engagement and enlargement, is the cornerstone of the current NSS and will survive the dynamic domestic process of changing administrations because of our enduring national values. Our values as a nation will not allow future administrations to stray far from this grand strategy, and for that reason its persistence becomes an underlying assumption in this paper.

The NSS published in 1998 clearly states the ends through three national objectives: enhancing our security, bolstering our economic prosperity, and promoting democracies abroad.⁹ Moreover, it identifies strategic concepts that support these ends and work toward matching ends and ways. For example, it argues: "Today's complex security environment demands that all our instruments of national power be effectively integrated to achieve our security objectives."¹⁰ Elsewhere it says: "To effectively shape the international environment and respond to the full spectrum of political threats and crises, diplomacy, military force, our other foreign policy tools and our domestic preparedness efforts must be closely coordinated."¹¹ Broadly speaking, the NSS articulates an inclusive security strategy that argues the United States must remain engaged internationally with a coordinated effort employing all elements of national power to shape the future global landscape, respond to crises short of and including war, and prepare for an unpredictable future. In doing so it must protect our national

interests and encourage continued prosperity. Unfortunately, the NSS also fails in a very important way: It creates a gross resource mismatch through its overemphasis on the military element of national power as an implementing means.

On one hand there is a well-developed strategic framework with clearly defined strategic objectives and an identifiable priority of national interests that support our abiding national values. But then it emphasizes ways and means in a manner that skews its implementation toward the military instrument, thereby causing cascading effects in the execution of foreign policy. The strategic concepts that guarantee our security are the requirements to shape the international environment with our integrated involvement, selectively respond to crises across the spectrum of conflict, and prepare for an uncertain future. Although these concepts are reinforced with an approach that stresses integration of all elements of national power, there really exists a strategic over-resourcing of the military that calls for its all-too-frequent and at times conflicting participation in matters of foreign policy.

The Pentagon justifiably receives criticism for selfish institutional survival pursuits, incorrect support of an outdated strategic doctrine, and a failure to see the post-Soviet Union world as it is. Arguably this keeps them marching in lock step to resource a military that is not only doing too

much, but also too much of the wrong thing.¹² Actually by design DOD's military strategy is correctly, but dangerously embedded in the NSS. "We must maintain superior military forces at the level of readiness necessary to effectively deter aggression, conduct a wide range of peacetime activities and small scale contingencies, and preferably in concert with regional friends and allies, win two overlapping major theater wars".¹³ So we can see that the problems with our military strategy have their roots in the national security strategy that it supports.

This serious imbalance in ways occurs throughout the national security strategy. As we explore the current NMS and its other supporting documents, this mismatch among ends, ways, and means recurs again and again. The overemphasis on certain military capabilities and its inherent lack of flexibility are worrisome during the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous post-Cold War era.

A MILITARY STRATEGY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

The national military strategy of shaping, responding, and preparing now reinforces the national security strategy/resource mismatch in an attempt to find relevancy for a Cold War force structure. Embracing the imperative of engagement, the NMS builds a military strategy that ultimately challenges rather than supports the President's NSS. The former military strategy

that supported containment called for a modern, trained military capability worldwide, ready for combat, and additionally available to help friends and allies build strong national defenses. "Shape, Respond, and Prepare Now" takes that apparatus and applies it to engagement, and a combat force now becomes a critical noncombatant component of peacetime U.S. foreign policy. What results is a military strategy that focuses more on the internal interests of the armed forces than it does on the external security environment.

The Secretary of Defense, William S. Cohen, in his Annual Report to the President and Congress (1998), states that the current administration's legacy is to evolve the inherited defense structure that won the Cold War into one that will meet the perils of a new century.¹⁴ Although easy to take out of context, this statement of evolutionary change, rather than dynamic revolutionary change, highlights the popular approach to military reform. Granted, it is extremely difficult during periods of peace to find the flame that will ignite profound change in strategy and structure. But merely attempting to find suitable applications of previously successful armed forces is the central and comfortable theme of not only the NMS, but also other supporting documents.¹⁵ A critical review of the most recent NMS, entitled *Shape, Respond, and Prepare Now -- A*

Military Strategy for a New Era exposes the problem with this approach.

The basic military strategy found in NMS (published in 1997) is that America will continue to lead globally through an uncertain future by shaping the security surroundings to reduce threats and then always be prepared to respond to any crises that threaten our interests. The strategy has three essential elements: 1) Shape the international environment in ways favorable to U.S. interests by promoting regional stability, reducing threats, and preventing conflicts; 2) Respond to the full spectrum of crises that threaten U.S. interests by deterring aggression and coercion in crises, conducting smaller-scale contingency operations, and fighting and winning major theater wars; and 3) Prepare now for an uncertain future through modernization, programs to ensure high quality personnel, and hedge against threats that could emerge in the form of a regional great power.¹⁶ Although consistent with the NSS, in theory this military strategic concept creates an immediate conflict for resources and an imbalance between the ways and means.

On a scale weighing finite resources, the concepts of shaping and responding will naturally compete. These are not mutually exclusive, for responding to crises helps shape the security environment as does maintaining a strong, competent

military shape in the same manner that occurred during the Cold War. But the readiness to respond is mitigated by the amount and intensity of military shaping activities. What occurs is a fundamental conflict that at times frequently leads to unpredictability in the execution of foreign policy.

This is an ambitious and questionable military strategy on its own merit, but when applied against the NSS imperative of engagement, the mismatch becomes overwhelmingly obvious. As summarized by Secretary Cohen, the success of the imperative of engagement and projection of a secure environment "rests on two fundamental assumptions: that the United States will remain politically and militarily engaged over the next 15 to 20 years and that it will maintain military superiority over current and potential rivals".¹⁷ For reasons that can be and are frequently challenged we have a military strategy that becomes a lopsided element of national power. In an effort to demonstrate the continued relevance of the current force structure, the shaping and responding concepts have become a panacea.

War as we've known it, and in particular the need for the United States to win two near simultaneous major theater wars as a basis for our military strategy is correctly being challenged. Record contends that we are approaching the end of large-scale conventional interstate warfare and with it the relevance of Clausewitz's supposition of total war among states¹⁸. He

believes that though military power has hardly disappeared, the necessary ingredients for large-scale conventional warfare among states are receding. Among the community of industrial states, especially the market democracies, war is disappearing as a means of resolving political disputes. The West's demonstrated mastery of modern conventional warfare has eliminated non-Western willingness to challenge these states on conventional military terms. Last but hardly least, the dissolution of the Soviet Union has all but ended the global East-West military confrontation that dominated the international political system during the four decades of the Cold War.¹⁹

A well-documented belief exists that budgetary and political considerations, not strategic considerations, drove the cut in force structure decisions of the 1990's. The bottom-up reviews didn't result in a new military, but simply shrank the old successful Cold War force. A lack of threat consensus resulted in shoehorning old paradigms into an unknown future. It also appears that during these reviews the ability of a reduced force structure to fight and win two simultaneous major theater wars was seriously debated and doubted by many, yet allowed to remain in both the national and military security strategies. Did the national military strategy simply result from efforts to accommodate interests and their desires to justify a shrinking force structure or to maintain certain

levels and type? The lingering controversy subsequently led to another effort to review our military strategy, the DOD's Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). The QDR became a pivotal attempt to reconcile previous service and joint bottom-up reviews.

REPORT OF THE QUADRENNIAL REVIEW

The Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review, published in May 1997, was an earnest attempt to answer critics that felt "America's military establishment and forces are trapped hopelessly in the past, still structured and struggling to fight yesterday's wars."²⁰ The QDR was a cooperative and coordinated effort between the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, the Service Components, and the Commanders in Chief of the Combatant Commands. The QDR was the fourth comprehensive review of the military since 1989 and the end of the Cold War and it was extensive and contentious. It spoke of the tough decisions that faced the country and the armed forces.

The QDR does a remarkable job of acknowledging and assessing the changing global security environment and nature of the threat. The report also attempts to look at the fiscal environment without flinching at the realities of competing demands during a strategic pause. The result is the birth of

the now familiar defense strategy of "Shape, Respond, and Prepare Now" and its original link to the NSS of engagement.

A significant part of the analysis the QDR conducts is the comparison of near-, mid-, and long-term risk. Risk management becomes the vehicle to identify strategy/resource mismatch.

Because resources are constrained and demands from threats other than the old conventional Soviet threat increasing, risk is measured in terms of implementing the full spectrum of the new national military strategy. The three components of the strategy are weighed against each other in terms of competing effectiveness and risk is communicated in terms the military's readiness to respond to anticipated or stated requirements in each. Effectiveness is then mitigated by the risk the NCA will assume if DOD is not funded at requested readiness levels. In other words, by responding to the myriad operations other than war, DOD's ability to prepare for the future is jeopardized because they are using tomorrow's dollars today²¹.

The full impact of the QDR is difficult to determine beyond the obvious cuts in end strength. But the question that remains nearly two years after its completion is this: Did the QDR significantly change the character of the force to meet the demands of the future or did it simply shrink the old force derived from the same paradigm? The persistence of this

question and the lingering skepticism caused Congress to call for yet another review.

REPORT OF THE NATIONAL DEFENSE PANEL

Congress established the National Defense Panel to essentially keep the Pentagon honest. The panel, composed of "outside defense experts" (although almost half are retired military), published their report entitled, *Transforming Defense: National Security in the 21st Century* in December 1997.²² The panel's job was to analyze the QDR and then recommend its own strategy for preparing the military for the challenges of the next millenium. The general feeling was that with the lack of bureaucratic and political influence, the panel could be much more aggressive in recommending force structure changes.

In the executive summary of the report, the die is essentially cast with the following statement: "Defense choices invariably entail risk; the only question is where we take risk. A significant share of today's Defense Department's resources is focused on the unlikely contingency that two major theater wars will occur at almost the same time. The Panel views this two-military-theater-of-war construct as, in reality, a force-sizing function. We are concerned that, for some this has become a means of justifying current forces."²³ The impartial experts immediately exposed the dilemma that had become obvious to many:

That the reform efforts to date had been evolutionary, and taken without a clearly defined threat, and that the comfortable path followed was to find relevancy for as much of the existing forces as possible. The objective had become force justification.

In a broader sense, the NDP in its review successfully considers the future security environment as an integrated effort between all of the elements of our national power and in doing so finds the key to a successful military strategy. "In the increasingly complex world that we foresee, the Department of Defense and its armed services cannot preserve U.S. interests alone. Defense is but one element of a broader national security structure. If we are to be successful in meeting the challenges of the future, the entire U.S. national security apparatus must adapt and become more integrated, coherent, and proactive."²⁴ It is this uncomplicated principle that holds the solution to matching ways and means with the imperative of engagement.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR A NEW NATIONAL MILITARY STRATEGY

What critical light has the preceding review of these policy documents shed on considerations for a military strategy for the next millenium? What can one conclude? First, we can state with some confidence that engagement is here to stay.

Secondly, our engagements need always to remain selective based on well-defined interests. Thirdly, the time is ripe for a national security act that reforms the current foreign policy apparatus so that it effectively leverages all elements of national power and judiciously ties ways and means to the stated ends. And finally, we must develop a military strategy that truly divorces itself from bureaucratic survival interests and focuses on interagency integration and conventional and strategic deterrence.

The imperative of engagement is here to stay, and so is the corresponding strategy of selective engagement. There is a strong argument that the Clinton administration actually executes a combination of collective security and selective engagement, with occasional tendencies toward primacy. But clearly our enduring national values will time and again drive political consensus and the will of the people toward selective engagement. Regardless of the composition of future administrations, it is unlikely that America will shed its active role in international politics. The most common understanding of United States foreign policy is that it will create a more secure, prosperous, and democratic world for the benefit of the American people. The real issue becomes leadership and the leveraging of all elements of our national power in the implementation of that foreign policy.

The operative word in the grand strategy of selective engagement is "selective". Without leadership and discipline, the natural evolution of this strategy is selective disengagement after prolonged U.S. involvement leads to burnout. Strong leadership and deft interagency coordination with the constant review of our national and regional interests will match an effective policy with the appropriate ways and means. Correcting the current resource mismatch between State and DOD will have a decidedly positive impact on our national security.

There are some that believe the time has come to pass a new national security act and to reorganize fundamentally our national security policy apparatus. The inclusion of civilian agencies in the framework of an executive level management and leadership structure to better integrate the elements of national power in the planning and performing of national security strategy and policy could have the same positive consequence that the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act has had on military reform. This act would establish an executive-level organization capable of integrating and achieving a coherent strategy and hopefully better align ends, ways, and means.²⁵ Such a restructuring at least holds promise for getting us out of the current dilemma identified in this paper.

The military needs to understand the inherent resource conflict in the strategy of shaping and responding. Shaping in an era of a smaller, more democratic global island, with more common interests among nation states, should become the purview of regional CINC's in the enhancement of their theater engagement plans and not a component of the larger national military strategy. Based on the demands in each area of operation, shaping activities should be tailored to fit the regional objectives. Coalitions and coalition warfare will continue to be critical, but the proponents who will build the necessary interoperability through shaping activities are the CINC's.

Responding is how the military helps shape the international security environment along with the other elements of national power. The ability of the U.S. armed forces to respond across the spectrum of conflict either conventionally or strategically is their strength, a proven shaping tool, and an instrument of deterrence. The vestiges of a resource driven force structure are discarded for a capabilities based force. A strong, peerless conventional and strategic military is the goal and resources are allocated to maintain that capability. The Revolution in Military Affairs continues to flourish and emerging technology is obviously leveraged. The necessary first step is to expose the two-theater-war model for what it is: a

dated force sizing tool. Lean, lethal, predominantly home-based conventional forces that are rapidly projected globally, give the NCA the most flexibility, reduce operating overhead, and maintain peer dominance.

The intended result of this type of military is its proper use as one element among many to support the imperative of engagement. A new national security act that creates a mechanism that matches ways and means will prevent the overcommitment of the military as the element of choice. Smaller-scale contingencies and humanitarian operations will continue to task the U.S. armed services, but the links to our national interests are apparent, and we need an effective forum to integrate the strategy with an assessment of the costs of responding to other potential conflicts. Again, the analysis is capabilities based not threat based on the "what if" of two major theater wars.

The primary goal of the U.S. military remains to fight and win our nation's wars. This sacred responsibility will never change regardless of the challenges of an uncertain future. A national military strategy that efficiently supports the imperative of engagement with all elements of national power is critical to this end and to the future success of the military. It is my hope that this review and the considerations offered

would contribute constructively to the development of a national military strategy for the new millenium.

WORD COUNT: 4,213

ENDNOTES

¹Joint Chiefs of Staff, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, JCS Publication 1, (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1 June 1987), 232.

²United States Army War College, Department of National Security and Strategy, "War, National Policy & Strategy", Course 2 Directive, Academic Year 1999, 142-149.

³Dr. Robert H. Dorff, Professor, Department of National Security Strategy, United States Army War College, in an address to the USAWC Class of 1999 on 26 August 1998, originally used this analogy. The quote is Dr. Dorff's and is a paraphrase of the exchange between Alice and the Cheshire Cat.

⁴Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy", International Security, Volume 21, No. 3, (Winter 1996-1997): 5-53.

⁵National Security Strategy of the United States, The White House, January 1988, 3.

⁶Steven Metz, "Why Aren't Americans Better at Strategy?", Military Review (January-February 1997): 187.

⁷B. H. Liddell Hart, Strategy, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1967), 351.

⁸The questions in this paragraph are based on remarks made by a speaker participating in the Commandant's Lecture Series at the United States Army War College.

⁹A National Security Strategy for a New Century, National Security Strategy of the United States, The White House, October 1998, 5.

¹⁰Ibid., 1.

¹¹Ibid., 7.

¹²Jeffrey Record, The Creeping Irrelevance of U.S. Force Planning, Manuscript for U.S. Army War College Ninth Annual Strategy Conference, 31 March-2 April 1998, 1-31. Admittedly, I fail to do justice to Dr. Record's more complex thesis, but he

thoughtfully captures a compelling argument for the continued fixation by the Department of Defense on preparing for multiple, large-scale conventional wars. I will again refer to his work later in this paper and review his position in more detail.

¹³NSS 1998, 7. On page 22 the NSS reinforces this with the following..."our military must be able to transition to fighting major theater wars from a posture of global engagement—from substantial levels of peacetime engagement overseas as well as multiple concurrent smaller scale contingencies. Withdrawing from such operations would pose significant political and operational challenges. Ultimately, however, the United States must accept a degree of risk associated with withdrawing from contingency operations and engagement activities in order to reduce the greater risk incurred if we failed to respond adequately to major theater wars."

¹⁴William S. Cohen, Annual Report to the President and the Congress, (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1998), vii.

¹⁵These supporting documents include the Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review, May 1997 and the Report of the National Defense Panel, December 1997, both of which are reviewed and referenced in more detail later in this paper.

¹⁶National Military Strategy of the United States of America, Shape, Respond, and Prepare Now: A Military Strategy for a New Era, (Washington, DC: September 1997), 3-4.

¹⁷Cohen, 4.

¹⁸Michael Howard, Clausewitz, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

¹⁹Record, 5, 11.

²⁰William S. Cohen, Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review, (Washington, DC: May 1997), iii.

²¹Let me expand this observation for additional clarity. The cost associated with the high operational tempo of responding to multiple operations other than war is potentially money that is available to modernize the force for future challenges. A static post-Cold War budget and a military strategy that causes

resource competition between the concepts, mean that we are often "robbing Peter to pay Paul".

²²Report of the National Defense Panel, Transforming Defense: National Security in the 21st Century, (Arlington, VA: December 1997), ii.

²³Ibid., vii.

²⁴Posen and Ross, 5.

²⁵One such effort in this area is the Project in Search of a National Security Strategy, initiated at a conference 20-21 August 1998, with three following conferences through 25-26 March 1999, hosted by Creative Associates International, Inc., 5301 Wisconsin Avenue NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC, 20015.

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